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RESEARCH NOTE

Northern Rocky Mountain Forest & Range Experiment Station

Missoula, Montana

No. 2 January 1940.

Christmas Tree Production in Western Montana, 1939

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Christmas tree production in 1939 reached an all-time peak with an estimated production of 1,967,350 trees as compared with 1,676,000 in 1938, the previous banner year. Lincoln and Flathead Counties were nip and tuck for top honors in 1939, with Lincoln County contributing 46 percent of the shipments (899,360 trees) and Flathead County, 44 percent (868,700 trees). Douglas fir was the only species cut in quantities.

Private lands supplied 82 percent of the 1939 cut, national forests 14 percent, and State of Montana forests 4 percent. Corresponding figures for 1938 were 91, 8, and 1 percent, respectively. The Kootenai National Forest as usual led the other national forests with a reported cut of 257,969 trees versus 116,533 in 1938. Other important national forests were the Bitterroot with 9,578 trees in 1939 versus 12,523 in 1938, and the Flathead with 4,340 (1939) versus 11,332 (1938). The average stumpage price received on national forests was 2.8 cents per tree, the same as in 1938. The average price on State lands was 3.4 cents compared with 3.1 cents in 1938. No figures are available on prices paid for stumpage on private lands.

The high production in 1939 may be attributed in part to a series of circumstances which do not always occur in a favorable combination. The growing season produced good foliage, the weather for cutting and hauling was nearly perfect,

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Number of Christmas Trees Produced in Western Montana in 1939

County	Railroad Shipments 1/								Truck shipments 2/	All shipments
	Great Northern		Northern Pacific		C.M.St.P.& P.		Total			
	Car-loads	Trees	Car-loads	Trees	Car-loads	Trees	Car-loads	Trees	Trees	Trees
	Number	Number	Number	Number	Number	Number	Number	Number	Number	Number
Flathead	170	807,500	-	-	-	-	170	807,500	61,200	868,700
Granite	-	-	11½	54,625	-	-	11½	54,625	4,140	58,765
Lake	-	-	14	66,500	-	-	14	66,500	5,040	71,540
Lincoln	176	836,000	-	-	-	-	176	836,000	63,360	899,360
Missoula	-	-	-	-	5	23,750	5	23,750	1,800	25,550
Powell	-	-	-	-	3½	16,625	3½	16,625	1,260	17,885
Ravalli	-	-	5	23,750	-	-	5	23,750	1,800	25,550
Total	346	1,643,500	30½	144,875	8½	40,375	385	1,828,750	138,600	1,967,350 3/

1/ Origin of trees is as follows, by counties and railway stations: Flathead County: Kalispell, 159 cars; Whitefish, 9 cars; Columbia Falls, 2 cars. Granite County: Drummond, 6½ cars; Hall, 5 cars. Lake County: Arlee, 7 cars; Polson, 6 cars; Ravalli, 1 car. Lincoln County: Eureka, 121 cars; Libby, 27 cars; Fortine, 15 cars; Rexford, 12 cars; Troy, 1 car. Missoula County: Missoula, 5 cars. Powell County: Deerlodge, 3½ cars. Ravalli County: Darby, 5 cars. Average number of trees per car is estimated at 4,750.

2/ Truck shipments (138,600 trees) are an estimate.

3/ The origin of the production (1,967,350 trees) is approximately as follows: State forests of Montana, 75,240 trees (4 percent); national forests, 276,333 trees (14 percent); private lands, 1,615,777 trees (82 percent).

The 276,333 trees cut on national forests originated as follows: Bitterroot, 9,578 trees; Cabinet, 1,159 trees; Deerlodge, 2,987 trees; Flathead, 4,340 trees; Kootenai, 257,969 trees; Lolo, 300 trees. The average stumpage price received for these trees was 2.8 cents each. The average price received by the State of Montana for trees cut from State forests was 3.4 cents each.

the Christmas spirit was better than usual throughout the country, and the curtailment of relief expenditures and shortening of work hours caused the more ambitious among the local residents to seek Christmas tree employment. The 1939 cut may be equalled in the next year or two, but is not apt to be greatly exceeded. Undoubtedly many of the best tracts have been or are being operated, and to increase production materially will mean moving back into the mountains where bad weather and poor roads are common occurrences.

In a general sort of way, it can be figured that the 1939 production furnished 1,600 man-months of employment to Montanans. This employment is important because it comes at a season of the year when jobs are usually scarce. From the standpoint of the administrator of public forests, the important thing to keep in mind is the amount of employment the trees provide, assuming, of course, that the cutting does not harm the future forest and that receipts for stumpage will exceed or equal the cost of administration. The employment aspect deserves emphasis because Christmas tree production is possible only during a certain period in the life of the stand. The jobs become available when the trees are 2 or 3 feet high and they cease to exist when the trees become larger than Christmas tree size. A survey of forest areas, with the idea of promoting the use of those which lend themselves to Christmas tree production, will be a worthwhile contribution to the general welfare. The Kootenai National Forest has done considerable along this line and the way their production is increasing year after year by leaps and bounds bespeaks the success of their efforts.

People often ask whether Christmas tree cutting can be done without damaging the future forest. No harm is done if the cutting is properly managed and only 10 to 20 trees are cut per acre per year. By cutting lightly many stands can be recut in a few years, and some oftener, with little reduction in the final yield of timber. It happens that Douglas fir, the Christmas tree species of the northern Rockies, does not make a very valuable lumber tree and in some cases Christmas tree cutting increases the value of the forest by improving conditions for growth of more valuable species.